

**Testimony submitted on February 18, 2009 to the  
State of Connecticut's Appropriations Committee  
on the**

**Governor's Proposed Budget: To eliminate the Children's Trust Fund and to transfer some  
of its programs to the Department of Children and Families.**

Good evening. As the assistant director at the Center for Social Research since August 2007, I have been the lead evaluator of several key programs administered by the Children's Trust Fund. I also have prior experience in program development as well as evaluation and have been providing consultation services to state agencies, school systems, and nonprofit organizations for over fifteen years. In all of my experience working with administrators and staff in human service organizations within the state of Connecticut, I have never seen an organization that so carefully designs and monitors its programs as Connecticut's Children's Trust Fund.

To begin, evaluation and research have always been integrated components of program development. Descriptive and outcome data are routinely analyzed, compiled in reports, and used for monitoring changes occurring in the areas that the programs are trying to impact. In addition, quality improvement teams have been instituted, and are used as a forum for establishing protocols and for monitoring program fidelity. When research or program monitoring identifies issues or areas to be developed, aggressive steps are taken to make changes and to develop policy. As a result of all this, programs have expanded, the number of families served has substantially increased over time, and evaluation continues to show many positive program aspects and outcomes.

Program development highlights include:

- The expansion of the Nurturing Families Network, a home visitation model designed to promote positive parenting and reduce incidences of child maltreatment. As of 2007 the program has been operating out of all 29 birthing hospitals in the state, has gone from two to forty-two program sites within twelve years, has moved through several periods of

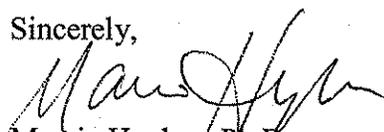
transition and growth, and most importantly, the rates of substantiated abuse among program participants continue to remain low. Moreover, NFN is among the first home visitation models in the country to focus their research and program development on engaging and supporting fathers. In addition, in conjunction with a study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, we are working with national researchers in implementing a pilot program to test the efficacy of in-home depression treatment to complement NFN home visiting.

- The recognition of Help Me Grow as an effective system for helping families with children who are facing behavioral, learning, and other developmental difficulties connect to local programs. This is a collaborative effort with several other state and private organizations. Because it has been effective in educating child care providers and families on developmental surveillance, addressing the often “disconnect” between families and program services, and preventing duplication of services, it has recently been selected as a national model and is currently being replicated in four other states throughout the country.
- The expansion of Family-School Connection, a program that was developed on best practices from the Nurturing Families Network, provides home visitation and support services for school personnel and the high risk families with young children who are frequently tardy, absent or otherwise disconnected from school. This program is currently being expanded from one to five school sites. Given the research on school success that shows risk for drop out can be identified as early as the third grade and the track record of the Children’s Trust Fund, we have every reason to believe that it will be an effective prevention program.

The work conducted by the Children’s Trust Fund is truly remarkable for the quality of its programs and their implementation, the result of systematically developing an infrastructure that includes evaluation research, continuous program monitoring and development, and collaboration across agencies. National research tells us that effective prevention programs have both social and cost benefits by decreasing the prevalence of families at risk for abuse and neglect, better child health, improved school readiness, improved mental health and family functioning, reduced arrests and convictions, greater workforce participation, and reduction in

public assistance. Based on my experience working with organizations that serve high risk families and children in the state of Connecticut, I do not believe the Department of Children and Families has the history, climate, or current operational management to implement such monumental prevention initiatives in Connecticut. In fact, the very recommendation shows a lack of appreciation for the importance of prevention and quality programming.

Sincerely,



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